



Surrey Hills Progress Association Inc.
Mailing address: C/- 157 Union Road Surrey Hills, 3127
Email: shpa3127@gmail.com
Website: www.surreyhillsprogress.org.au

Level Crossing Removal Authority
GPO Box 4509
Melbourne
Victoria 3001
Dear Sir/Madam,

13 February 2021

MONT ALBERT – SURREY HILLS LEVEL CROSSING REMOVAL PROJECT

The Surrey Hills Progress Association met on 11 February 2021 and resolved to make the following submission to the Project Concept, exhibited to the public in December 2020.

We acknowledge the wider transport benefits of this project and continue to support the overall engineering approach, including the amalgamation of the two railway stations. This is on the basis that the savings made, in having only one station, will be redeployed to address problems identified in three key precincts, which we discuss through this submission.

These problems, unique to this project, need to be properly addressed to achieve a satisfactory outcome for the local community and the wider public.

In summary the problems are:

1. The removal of two railway stations from the local shopping villages which have historically formed around them, thereby removing a key source of business generation and social connection for each village and jeopardising their future viability;
2. The location of the new station in narrow residential streets not intended for this purpose and not well suited to accommodating the traffic and access flows necessary to service the new station;
3. The need to reposition and enhance car parking capacity currently spread across two existing station precincts and surrounding streets, to service the single new station location; and
4. The impact of site levels on accessibility to the new station (excessive stairs and ramping) and on building height/bulk at both the Surrey Hills entrance and Mont Albert entrance, where there is potential for overshadowing and intrusion into Lorne Parade Reserve and on the amenity of abutting residential properties in Lorne Parade, Beresford Street, Windsor Crescent and the east end of Montrose Street.

It is clear that the narrow width and terrain of this railway corridor presents many constraints and challenges to overcome. To address these problems we believe, as a general principle, that much of the corridor should be covered by decking, particularly at three primary impacted locations -Surrey Hills station precinct, the new station precinct (from the western end of the new station between Lorne Parade & Beresford Street to Mont Albert Road) and the Mont Albert station precinct.

Further, where it is not feasible to provide decking over the trench, use should be made of other options such as cantilever structures for paths to relieve pressure on corridor width and allow surrounding amenity to be maintained for residents.

The Surrey Hills Progress Association acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the traditional custodians of the land in this area, and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

With the above in mind we have set out some broad directions for the project, as follows:

PROTECT & ENHANCE THE SHOPPING VILLAGES

The villages at Mont Albert and Surrey Hills serve both a social and economic role and have been important hubs for shopping and local activity over many years, coexisting with their railway stations.

The level crossing removal project must integrate with both villages, by improving the immediate environment and the interface the rail corridor has to each village – creating community spaces that unify the areas and maintain the focal points occupied by the present stations, together with improved pedestrian/bicycle access and parking arrangements.

As alluded to above, avoiding the retrofitting of existing stations and/or constructing two new stations has realised significant public savings that should be balanced by social and place making renewal, such as new community open spaces in the heart of each village.

Recommended Actions:

- Construct a new Village Square over the railway line in both villages, with pedestrian and cycling connections;
- Adopt urban design guidelines that set a theme for each Square, consistent with the character and history of the shopping villages;
- Retain and restore the historical Mont Albert station building for community purposes yet to be explored, within the new Square;
- Undertake a comprehensive traffic and car parking study across the area to properly inform and fashion a response to the changing conditions;
- Ensure adequate car parking is provided for short term train travellers and shoppers, in addition to commuter parking; and
- Incorporate a public toilet adjacent to the new Square at Surrey Hills.

NEW RAILWAY STATION INCLUDING POTENTIAL IMPACT ON RESIDENTIAL AMENITY AND ON PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AT THE LORNE PARADE RESERVE

The impact on the residential amenity of properties directly abutting the rail corridor is significant particularly those located in Lorne Parade and Beresford Street - narrow residential streets that presently have a plantation of trees alongside the railway corridor.

The potential outcome for these properties is the loss of all vegetation opposite their properties and the looming presence of a new railway station directly facing them.

Under the current proposal it appears that the road pavement widths of Lorne Parade and Beresford Street could also be significantly reduced with no on street parking on either side of the street – both streets becoming one way. Lorne Parade may also be expected to host a shared user path.

In a nutshell, it is not overstating the situation to say these properties face a significant change in residential amenity as they transition from a pleasantly treed outlook and environment (albeit opposite an existing railway line) to an intensive commercial and public situation with a large, new Premium railway station at their door.

As noted above, the engineering exercise in seeking to 'shoehorn' a premium railway station into such a narrow corridor has obviously been difficult. However the solution must acknowledge the adverse impacts for the abutting residential area and must solve the amenity issues.

This needs to involve restoration of the botanical landscape, provision of on street resident parking and avoiding the commercial excesses of such a large public facility in these streets – including from through traffic and drop off activity, public lighting glare and large station entrances that will spill directly out into the residential precinct.

The focus of station activity must be away from these narrow residential streets. We believe the station instead must have a strong identity on Mont Albert Road.

There should be public open space, over the railway line, to create a parklike frontage to Mont Albert Road with pathways leading directly down to the station entrance, which should face directly to Mont Albert Road.

Innovative thinking must also be applied to the station footprint to reduce the width impact across the reservation from Beresford Street to Lorne Parade to free up more space for these streets. Covering the railway station may be the only alternative to ensure proper facilities and amenity for the directly affected residential area.

The new railway station should be of a distinctive architectural built form strongly tied to the character of the surrounding area. The use of materials such as brick and timber, natural colours and how the visible parts of the building come together should relate to the scale and current feel of the precinct.

Car parking and traffic management and bus and taxi arrangements around the new railway station precinct also lack detail and need to be clearly spelt out.

Finally, it is unclear the extent of vegetation loss within Lorne Parade Reserve. Also, whether the reserve will be reduced in size and the topography altered to accommodate the station building and associated infrastructure. The project must reveal the plans for this significant piece of local public open space that is highly valued by the local residents

Recommended Actions:

- Provide public open space and a parklike setting in front of the new railway station on Mont Albert Road, with cover over the railway line to establish a strong address, station identity and connection to Mont Albert Road and the Mont Albert Village;
- For the proper functioning of the new station this open space should extend to the station entrance and ensure that pedestrian access and activity is focussed directly to Mont Albert Road, with pathway connections also linking with the proposed car parking and vehicle drop off area;
- No station entrances should be directly on to either Beresford Street or Lorne Parade, where reinstatement of genuine areas for landscaping, mature trees and on street parking must be the priority;
- Adopt an architectural style and form for the new station building that is understated and consistent with the scale and character of the area;

- Ensure Lorne Parade and Beresford Street are provided with on-street car parking for the existing residential properties and that the streets do not become drop off zones for railway patrons;
- Ensure Lorne Parade only hosts a shared path/bicycle link if on-street car parking and vegetation replacement can first be accommodated;
- As discussed above, assess all options including full decking over the station building, to provide the space required to meet the amenity and infrastructure needs described above;
- Management of noise and light glare will be a critical thing that must be controlled along the narrow residential corridor of Lorne Parade and Beresford Street where platforms will be in close proximity to the residences (including platform lighting, path lighting and station PA systems); and
- Clarify expected car parking capacity and distribution around the area that supports Park and Ride amenity at each end of the new station.

STATION ENTRANCE – SURREY HILLS END

The initial concept plan suggests that the station entrance at the Surrey Hills end will be quite elevated and may present as a large bulky structure to adjacent properties. This includes potential overshadowing and visual intrusion on the Lorne Parade Reserve.

There are also concerns with the number of steps and length of ramping necessary to gain access to the station at the Surrey Hills end. Does the engineering design, in creating a level platform through this hilly corridor, actually result in accessibility issues for the southern end of the station that will be problematic for many train travellers? Why are escalators not being provided?

Recommended Action:

- The architectural design and height of the station entrance at the Surrey Hills end should be reviewed to ensure the amenity of neighbouring properties is respected and that there is suitable and comfortable access to the station for all train travellers – access that does not involve excessive stairs and ramping beyond what is reasonable and tolerant, comparable with other new railway stations; and
- In the case of Lorne Parade Reserve, firmly align the station entry and exit and associated facilities with other existing infrastructure, to ensure it minimises the impact on the reserve and maximises the retention of green open space (eg. bike shed, shared user paths and pathways to station). Incursion on Lorne Parade Reserve should be minimised and attention given to connections with the Union Road commercial area, to retain the link between commuters and the traders.

EXISTING SURREY HILLS RAILWAY STATION CARPARK

The Project concept states that the car parking area on both sides of the present Surrey Hills railway station will be rebuilt to modern day standards to ensure access for people of all abilities, with no loss of parking by arranging the spaces more efficiently. New lighting and CCTV will also be installed.

Related to this is a federal government commitment to provide additional commuter car parking spaces at Surrey Hills.

In regard to the latter, we believe any proposal to design and construct a decked car park (if this is under discussion) must consider the future potential of this strategic site.

Covering the railway line would best realise that potential and enable new development to be sympathetically designed to suit the surrounds, including generous building setbacks from Bedford Avenue and Windsor Crescent and pedestrian connections across the site.

Recommendation Actions:

- That any plan for additional car parking, for example a decked car park, should carefully consider the location of the building footprint to avoid impact on the amenity of residential areas located opposite the site; and
- In terms of forward planning, we believe the Surrey Hills railway station site and car parking area, of approximately 1.5 hectares in size, should be subject to a master plan approach before any major development occurs. We do not believe government planning policy would favour a one-off building for decked car parking that may underutilise the site and constrain future opportunities for attractively designed spatially separated mixed use development and community facilities on the site; a large infill site which ultimately will sit directly between the Surrey Hills shopping village and the new railway station.

IMPROVE ACCESS FOR THE COMMUNITY

Accessibility should be a high priority to magnify the benefits of the railway project for all the community – both local residents, commuters and the wider public.

Improved walking paths and cycling routes, shared paths and links to rail, bus and taxis and to each shopping village and local schools is key.

Pedestrian and cycling access across the rail corridor should be maximised to further improve access to transport facilities and facilitate over trench connections and activity.

Recommended Actions:

- Provide pedestrian and cycling access across the railway corridor at intermittent points as well as within the shopping villages eg. link the south end of Wilson Street with Lorne Parade Reserve via the new station entrance; and
- Provide direct, legible and well-lit pathway connections from both shopping villages direct to the station entrances eg. as mentioned above, construct a direct pathway from Union Road to the station entrance along the south side of Bedford Avenue, within the present railway carpark, and include sufficient width for street trees.

STRENGTHEN THE TREED CHARACTER OF THE CORRIDOR

The rail corridor is presently planted with mature vegetation along main roads and side streets and this is a valued part of the existing local character.

The project should protect this character by new tree planting and especially ensure continuous and significant planting along highly visible sections of the corridor such as in Lorne Parade and Beresford Street.

Recommended Action:

- Adopt a landscape and planting theme for the railway corridor and adjacent residential streets that, by replacing and planting additional trees and low level landscaping, is consistent with the garden character of the area.

PROJECT BOUNDARY MAP AND CONSTRUCTION STAGE

We anticipate there will be further explanation given in relation to the 'Planning Project Boundary' maps dated 08/12/2020 showing construction related impacts of the project and how local streets will be affected, as well as the properties specifically identified.

We note these properties include those between 93-257 Union Road, 615-837 Whitehorse Road, 297-457 Mont Albert Road, 1 Gordon Street up to Mont Albert Road, 332-334 Mont Albert Road, 1-7 Hamilton Street, IG Hamilton Street and the Wolseley Close reserve.

The inclusion of public open space reserves such as the Canterbury Sports Ground, Lorne Parade Reserve, Beatty Street Playground and the Surrey Park sporting fields and surrounds will raise obvious concerns if local open space is to be affected during and/or after the project. The intentions with respect to these areas should be clearly spelt out.

CONCLUSION

We believe the directions set out above complement the LXP Concept and are necessary to properly accommodate the project within the confined corridor of this residential area. These directions will be visually illustrated in information provided to the LXP in the coming two weeks.

We appreciate the open communication and respectful way in which the LXP has conducted public consultation to date, including through the three 'Virtual community information sessions'.

However, this has also been against the background of a project in its early design stages, with only a basic project concept and artist impressions for the public to view.

With respect, we believe now is the appropriate time for the full engineering design options, cadastral information and the like to be released, so the public can be further informed about this major future defining infrastructure project in its midst.

To conclude, we look forward to continuing to advocate for and develop the directions outlined above, in open consultation with the LXP team and the two Councils, as well as with our local community.

Yours sincerely,

Greg Buchanan
President

cc: Paul Hamer MP
Will Fowles MP
Cr Andrew Munroe (Mayor, Whitehorse City Council)
Cr Garry Thompson (Mayor, Boroondara City Council)
Simon McMillan (CEO Whitehorse CC)

Hon Josh Frydenberg MP
Matthew Bach MP
Cr Amanda McNeill (Whitehorse CC)
Cr Jane Addis (Boroondara CC)
Phillip Storer (CEO Boroondara CC)